

ISSA Proceedings 2002 - Argument To Death And Death As An Argument: Logic, Rhetoric, Dialectics, And Economics



In the ordinary English the expressions containing an appeal to death are used very often. During Christian marriage service is used, for example, the famous phrase: “Till death us do part”, that is, people will stay together and love each other until one of them dies. Football fans know very well the meaning of term “sudden death”.

“Death rattle” and “death wish” are another examples of verbal constructions containing in it an appeal to death. In perspective of philosophy of argumentation (argumentology) death is not only the natural end of life; time and manner of dying; the state of being dead. A death phenomenon occupies a specific place in human communication as a whole and in verbal intercourse, in particular. To elucidate the death’s unique role in argumentative discourse I coined the term “an argument to death” and tried to discover some elements (or probably only some hints) about nature of the argument as well as its place in totalitarian argumentation (Tchouechov, 1999, 784). Argument to death is a verbal construction (discourse (text)) containing appeal to natural and social end of life, time and manner of dying and is a very important means of convincing and (or) persuasion.

If we look through any textbook on logic written in English, Russian, Belorussian and many other languages, we certainly find this argument. Stephen N.Tomas wrote for example:

“Anyone who said, “All men are mortal and Socrates is a man, but Socrates is not mortal” would be involved in a self-contradiction. Here, as in any other deductively valid argument, if one accepts the truth of the reasons, then one has no choice but to acknowledge the truth of the conclusion. But *few* (stressed by me – V.Tch.) important arguments are this simple” (Tomas, 1981,105-106). This is using the argument to death in evident way.

In other textbooks we can not find using the argument evidently, like in the

textbook written by Morris R. Cohen and Ernst Nagel. In their textbook the following discourse about radicalism is used: "All social radicals are a danger to society; Tom Mooney is a social radical; it follows that Tom Mooney is a danger to society" (Cohen and Nagel, 1993, 76). The authors supposed that in radicalism anyone is balanced on the border of death and life, and social radical Mooney is a real danger to society.

Unlike Cohen and Nagel, Howard Kahane used the argument to death but he did not realize it more evidently when he gave the following simple example: "*Since it is wrong to kill a human being (premise); it follows that capital punishment is wrong (conclusion), because capital punishment takes the life of (kills) a human being (premise)*" (Kahane, 1995, 4).

In such a way Trudy Govier reasoned when giving her illustration of logical sense of the argument to death: "All consistent opponents of abortion are opponents of capital punishment. No opponents of capital punishment are orthodox traditional Catholics. So, no consistent opponents of abortion are orthodox traditional Catholics" (Govier, 1985, 162).

It is quiet possible that Thomas can not be considered as a servant of Thanatos (Greece mythical representative of death) in logic as well as Cohen, Nagel, Kahane, and Govier are not the Thanatos agents too. If we compare their textbooks we will find out that the argument to death is used when an intellectual force of deduction and categorical syllogism are discussed. Often this argument is used as an illustration of deductive validity of another kinds of logical discourse. "Thus, - wrote Cohen and Nagel, - if *All men are mortal* required that there should be men and mortals, since we may validity infer *All immortals are non-men*, we would be compelled to affirm that there are immortals as well as non-men" (Cohen and Nagel, 1993, 63). Consequently the authors of the textbooks on logic who used this argument in evident way, knew about its valid force probably by intuition, learning experience, and tradition. The difference between textbooks is that in some of them the argument to death is used in evident way, in others we can find only the trace of the argument. It is interesting to stress that in *Prior Analytic* Aristotle, one of the founders of logic as science, the argument to death was not used in evident way. In *Prior Analytics* he described syllogism as a kernel of deductive and demonstrative reasoning and avoided giving examples of "death form" of categorical syllogism. At the best he showed that major, minor and middle terms of syllogism might be connected with life as death opposition. For Aristotle the typical terms of syllogism were "a living being, essence and a man".

Though we can not find the famous syllogism: “All men are mortal; Socrates is a man; Socrates is mortal” in the Aristotle work but we can find the ideas that Socrates is the best representative of humanity and a living being is a very instructive term of categorical syllogism shows his high standard of logical validity. In accordance with personal experience of Greek philosopher we could suppose that his teacher – Plato was the first thinker who realized that death was a strong, probably the strongest argument.

It is known that Anikered Kirenskey saved Plato’s life when he ransomed him out of slavery. As to Socrates, he refused to save his life himself. Plato offered him escape, because he considered life being the great value, but in *Apology of Socrates* he reasoned differently. He substantiated the right of Socrates to accept death. Plato was the first who realized the meaning of death as an argument. Aristotle, his disciple, had to begin understanding of an argument to death, at least unconsciously, in a logical manner.

In addition by influence of Christianity an argument to death became an example of high level of logical validity. In the book of *Being* (2,16-17) God reported to Adam and Eve if they ate from the Tree of Knowledge they would die. By the way it means that in the Testament the argument to death is initially considered the strongest means of persuasion. Not surprising that when theorists of argumentation today discuss Aristotle’s study of syllogism they use the death form of syllogism evidently. Frans van Eemeren, Rob Grootendorst, and Tyark Kruiger wrote: Here is an example of a syllogism of the type treated by Aristotle:

1. All humans are mortal,
2. All Australians are humans,
3. All Australians are mortal (Van Eemeren, Grootendorst, and Kruiger, 1987, 60).

Aristotle understood that categorical syllogism and deduction were a corner stone of logical discourse. In order to show the valid characteristics of the discourse he had to appeal to the life and Socrates as a figure of humanity and death according to tradition and Plato.

In the post-Aristotelian formal logic an argument to death is something like the Freudian slip, or a product of rationalization of logical unconsciousness, the valid means of persuading and convincing.

The correct (valid) arguments used in logic are best known as *ad rem* arguments. The arguments used in rhetoric are quite different. These arguments include an interaction of an orator and an audience and usually called *ad-arguments*.

Hamblin listed the following forms of the ad-arguments: ad passiones, and superstitionem, ad imaginationem, ad invidiam, ad crumenam, ad quietum, ad metum, ad fidem etc. as well as well-known ad hominem, ad vericundiam arguments and etc (Hamblin, C. 1970, 41). English scientist did not discuss an argument to death. The Russian theorist G.Toulchinsky who was developed my analysis of the argument to death proposed to replace our name of the argument by the name of "argumentum ad morti" (Toulchinsky, 2000, 1-3). More essentially that before Hamblin ad-arguments were often considered as logic fallacies. A reducing of this argument to so called arguments of "ad series" will be connected with fallacious connotations. Humblin pointed out: "A fallacy is a fallacious argument" (Humblin, 1970, 224). I believe that the argument to death could not be considered as an argument from so called "ad series", that is as absolutely similar to arguments ad hominem, ad verecundiam and so on, especially in light of contemporary studying of fallacies.

In a light of logic a valid form of the argument to death is not a fallacy at all. In perspective of rhetoric the argument to death is not discussed specially and, for example, the Humblin's ignorance of the argument may give us an additional reason to the hypothesis about bilateral nature of the argument. Indeed, if we take into account a very wide ordinary context of this argument using we can believe that the argument to death is a very sound rhetorical argument. To stress its rhetorical force it will be reasonable to distinguish logical and rhetorical forms of the argument to death and save a name of "an argument ad morti" for the latter. In difference to the argument to death an argument ad morti can be persuasive not being valid in logical sense of the word. In one of Alabama undertaker's office ad was offered, for instance, free funeral for those drunk drivers who would be killed since 31st December till 1st January 2002. Another example can be given. Let us imagine a discussion in a Soviet totalitarian state about harvest. Every summer during Soviet history Belarussians, Russians were involved in a struggle for a good harvest. In Soviet epoch the following messages were widespread: "Every should assist in the struggle for a good harvest: doctors, pilots, students, professors etc. Professor X does not want to assist. By refusing to struggle for a good harvest he contributes to the annihilation (to the death) of the country". The rhetorical form of the argument to death may be and very often is invalid but it is very effective in a process of persuading. The rhetorical force of the argument depends on characteristics of audience, its culture, and traditions. When anyone uses the argument he does not see in his audience a responsible

and free interlocutor. It is interesting to stress that not only in Hamblin's book but and in the contemporary compendium on rhetoric by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca we do not find the argument to death too. One hint about Perelmanian ignorance of the argument may be connected with status of human death in a big industrial city.

In *The New Rhetoric* Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca wrote: "Conversely, a death among the inhabitants of a big city is an absolutely routine matter, but if it strikes the small circle of our acquaintances, we find it extraordinary" (Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, 73). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca pointed out a meaning of an audience of death as an argument, or a role of, psychologically speaking, of reference group of language appeal. "Opposition between the two reference groups that is between group of inhabitants of a big city and relatives, or acquaintances enables some to be astonished that a mortal being should be dead and others to be astonished by this astonishment" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, 73). Belgian rhetoricians believed that above-mentioned presumption about status of death is normal and has to be an object of an agreement.

An argument to death has a special role in a framework of dialogue (debate, critical discussion etc.), or in dialectics perspective. According to Frans H. van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst there are some traditional fallacies as violations of rules for critical discussion that are using of all stages of critical discussion. They are the fallacy of ambiguity (misusing referential, syntactic or semantic ambiguity) and the fallacy of straw man. The argument of straw man imputes a fictitious standpoint to the other party or distorting the other party's standpoint. One may suppose that an argument to death can be used at all stages of critical discussion (opening stage, confrontation stage, argumentation stage, and concluding stage). Van Eemeren and Grootendorst did not stress specially a unique role of ambiguity and straw man arguments in critical discussion. We may suppose that these arguments are specific modification of an argument to death.

At stage of confrontation the argument to death can stimulate a possibility to begin of discussion. This argument will block a discussion possibility as well as at the opening stage of critical discussion. At the stage of argumentation the argument is one of the crucial means of providing an exchange of opinions, as authors of logic textbooks believe. At the final stage of critical discussion the argument to death may create the high level impressions of persuasiveness of

discourse. In this sense the argument to death has a unique role in critical discussion and has an essential difference to the above-mentioned arguments. The unique role of death phenomenon in verbal intercourse may be illustrated by logic, rhetoric, and dialectic aspects of an argument to death and may be exposed in following manner. In formal logical perspective the argument to death is of high validity example. From rhetoric point of view the argument to death is an instance of high level of argument's persuasiveness. If the argument is logically invalid it has to be called an argument *ad mortem*. In dialectic framework the argument to death is an argument that can and it is to destroy human intercourse possibility.

One may suppose that the argument is a rhetoric contraband to formal logic and dialectical contraband to rhetoric.

In theory of dialogue (dialectics) the argument to death is not any kind of contraband or fallacy (an argument *ad mortem*). It is one of the cornerstones of argumentation possibility itself. For better understanding of the argument in dialectic argumentative perspective one should analyze death as "argument" in human culture too. This another sense of "the argument to death" is connected with human history and culture, religion, tradition, economy, and etc.

In theory of economy the argument to death, for example, plays a very essential role too. If we compare various paradigms of economics – Mercantilism and Physiocracy (Physiocrats), Marxism, Institutionalism (Institutionalists), Monetarism (Monetarists) etc. we will find that demarcation between these theories is connected with appeal to limits of State or individual existence. Mercantilism was based on the beliefs about a nation's wealth counted by gold and the world had a limited supply of wealth. According to physiocrats land was the single source of wealth. Institutionalists believed that governments could end depressions by increasing their spending. Monetarists believed that government should increase the money supply at a constant rate to promote economic growth. In perspective of classical political economy and the study of the ways nations use of wealth very important is a slightly changed phrase of Benjamin Franklin, that *Nothing is certain but death and taxes*. A state that has no any taxes is not a state at all. In economics perspectives there are many specific economic forms of the argument to death. These forms of the arguments to death are used as the criteria of punishment, social utility, economic growth etc.

To analyze death phenomenon farther we should take into account death as an argument. Death as an argument depends on social and personal experience.

In contemporary Russia and Belarus the number of murders is less than the number of suicides. One of the important reasons for suicide in Belarus society in transition is economic situation of the society and a person. It means that in a proper social context (the context of transforming economy) the economic realities can be transformed into death (suicide) as an argument. After the terrorist's attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City on 11 September 2001 death became obviously not only an acute private, practical, and cultural human problem but also an urgent public and intercultural one.

However, death was a less convincing argument than life in Ancient Greece for Heraclitus, Plato and Aristotle as well as for some contemporary religious fanatics. There are various hierarchies of values. According to Greek philosophers, hierarchy of values, the death of man deserved praise only if he died with fortitude during the war. The philosophers of Ancient Greece believed that "Gods and people honored only the people, or warriors killed by Ares (Greece God of war-V.Tch.)" (Heraclitus). Ares was considered the strongest and the cruelest God in the Ancient Greece mythology. Fortunately, a war in the context of which death as the argument has the highest level of persuasiveness, for philosophers of Ancient Greece as well as to non-fanatics, was not a universal, and absolute context of their being. That is why in spite of the fact that Plato did not use and study the argument to death he could not disregard death as an argument. There were at least two events in the Plato's biography, which made him, think on death as an argument. The first was the execution of his teacher, Socrates. The second was Plato's fear of death after he was sold into slavery by the tyrant Dionis and found himself on the island of Egina. According to the laws of the island the first Athenian came to Egina had to be executed without trial. The legend reports when the people on the island learned that the first Athenian who came to the island was a philosopher they decided to let him stay alive.

It can be supposed that after Plato's studying of death as an argument death phenomenon could become an object of studying and using in logic, rhetoric, and dialectics, especially in rhetoric of undemocratic dialogue. But even J. Stalin understood clearly that death is a very weak argument. Stalin widely used the statement: "There is a man - there are problems; if there is not a man - there are not problems". It means that death solves all problems and not only problems of reasoning, but and life. Russian philosopher N. Fedorov considered victory over death to be the main object of the humanity (Fedorov, N., 1982). This object could be fulfilled only by common efforts of all people. It was the main idea of Fedorov's philosophy of common business. Fedorov died in 1903, but even today his ideas

are directed to future.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by Research Support Scheme of the Open Society Support Foundation, grant No: 42/2000.

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